The Muslim Woman's Dress

According to the Qur'an and Sunnah

لباس المرأة المسلمة

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[1]**This paper is based on Muhammad Nasiruddin Al-Albani's *Hijabul-Marat-il-Muslimah Fil Kitab Wassunnah*, 3rd Printing, Al-Maktab-ul-Islami, Beirut, Lebanon 1389 A.H. (1969).**

Other sources checked include "tafsir" of the Qur'an including those by Ibn-Kathir, Yusuf Ali, and Sayyid Qutb; authorities in Fiqh including Sayyid Sabiq's *Fiqh-us-sunnah* and Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's *Al-Halal Walharam Fil-Islam,* and a reference on Hadith from *Mishkat-ul-Masabeeh.*

لباس المرأة المسلمة

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

INTRODUCTION

To some as a subject the Muslim women's dress may sound trivial. The shari'ah, however, assigns it moral, social, and legal dimensions.

One basic requirement to be a true believer according to the Qur'an is to make one's opinions, feelings, and inclinations subservient to whatever Allah and his Messenger have decided:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى
ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥٓ أَمْرًا أَن يَكُونَ لَهُمُ ٱلْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ
وَمَن يَعْصِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَٰلًا مُّبِينًا

> It is not befitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Apostle, to have any option about their decision: if any one disobeys Allah and His Apostle, he is indeed on a clearly wrong path.
>
> *Surat-ul-Ahzab* (33) 36

Placing, therefore, one's personal opinions, feelings, or inclinations above or at the same level as the commandments of Allah is the ultimate of human pride and vanity. This means, in effect, that a mortal is responding to Allah's guidance saying: "O my creator! Your Law is Your Own opinion. I have my own opinion, and I know best what is good for me." This attitude is befitting for unbelievers and hypocrites, but not for a believer no matter how imperfect (all are!) one may be in implementing Islam in one's life.[2]

The exposition of truth in an honest and straight forward way may thus cause some unease even to good and sincere Muslims. It may seem safer and diplomatic to avoid the issue altogether, or to present it in a diluted and vague way. It is even safer and more 'diplomatic' to

[2] A distinction should be made between, a) the acceptance of Allah's word as true and supreme in itself while not succeeding to implement it fully in one's life hoping and trying to reach that goal, and b) regarding one's own opinions or other social values and pressures as more valid than Allah's injunctions and trying to find various excuses to justify one's breaking of the law of Allah. It is the latter attitude which is not only blameworthy but akin to unbelief.

explicitly or implicitly condone each others' infractions, to help each other find excuses and to rationalize our disobedience to Allah subhanahu wata'ala. This attitude is neither new nor it is without consequences. As the Qur'an presents it:

لُعِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنۢ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ عَلَىٰ لِسَانِ دَاوُۥدَ وَعِيسَى ٱبْنِ مَرْيَمَ ۚ

ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوا۟ وَّكَانُوا۟ يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾ كَانُوا۟ لَا يَتَنَاهَوْنَ

عَن مُّنكَرٍ فَعَلُوهُ ۚ لَبِئْسَ مَا كَانُوا۟ يَفْعَلُونَ

Curses were pronounced on those among the children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of Dawood [David] and of Esa [Jesus] the son of Mary: because they disoebeyed and persisted in excesses.

Nor did they (usually) forbid one another the iniquities which they committed: evil indeed were the deeds which they did.
Surat-ul-Ma'idah (5) 81-82

REQUIREMENTS IN DRESS

THE FIRST REQUIREMENT: Extent of Covering

The dress must cover the whole body except for the areas specifically exempted. The Qur'an states:

(30) قُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَـٰرِهِمْ
وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

(31) وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَـٰتِ يَغْضُضْنَ
مِنْ أَبْصَـٰرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ
وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا
وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ
بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا
لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ ءَابَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ ءَابَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ
أَوْ أَبْنَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَآءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ
أَوْ بَنِىٓ إِخْوَٰنِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِىٓ أَخَوَٰتِهِنَّ
أَوْ نِسَآئِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَـٰنُهُنَّ
أَوِ ٱلتَّـٰبِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُو۟لِى ٱلْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ ٱلرِّجَالِ
أَوِ ٱلطِّفْلِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا۟ عَلَىٰ
عَوْرَٰتِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ
مَا يُخْفِينَ مِن زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوٓا۟ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ
جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons,their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right

hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O you believers! Turn all toward Allah that you may attain bliss.

Surat-un-Nur (24) 30-31

These 'ayahs contain, among other thing, two main injunctions:

1. A Muslim woman should not display her beauty and adornment (*zeenah*) except for "that which must ordinarily appear of it"[3] (ma dhahara minha), or "that which is apparent."[4]

The word *zeenah*[5] lends itself to two related meanings: a) natural or bodily beauty,[6] and, b) acquired adornment such as rings, bracelets, and clothes.

The part of *zeenah*, exempted from the above injunction, was interpreted in two ways:

a. The face and the hands. This is the interpretation of the majority of the jurists, past and present.[7] This interpretation is confirmed by *ijma'* (consensus) that a Muslim woman is allowed by Islam to uncover her face and hands during pilgrimage and even during the prayers, while the rest of her body is regarded as *'awrah* (that which should be covered).[8] This interpretation is based on the authority of Prophet Muhammad (Allah's blessing be upon him), especially the *hadith* in which he says:

". . . If the woman reaches the age of puberty, No (part of her body) should be seen but this — and he pointed to his face and hands."

b. Whatever appears of the woman's body owing to uncontrollable factors such as the blowing of the wind, or out of

[3]Yusuf Ali, op. cit. p. 904.

[4]M.M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, p. 25.*

[5]According to *Lisan-ul-'Arab* (Dictionary of Arabic language), *the term zeenah* includes "all that which beautifies," quoted in (Mrs.) Ne'mat Sidqy, *At-Tabarruj,* 17th Printing, Dar-ul-I'tisam, Egypt, 1975 pp. 20-21.

[6]The term *zeenah* is used in the Qur'an to refer to children, wealth, and natural beauty in Allah's creation. See example Qur'an 17:47, 16:8, 37:6 and 3:14.

[7]This is the interpretation of Malik, Ash-Shafi'i, Abu Hanifa and a version of Ahmad b. Hanbal. See Al-Albani op. cit., pp. 41.42.

[8]Al-Albani provides ample evidence tht the covering of the face and hands is not required. Suffice it to say that the woman is allowed to uncover her face and hands during such spiritual acts as the prayers and pilgrimage. See pp. 25-46.

necessity such as the bracelets or even the outer clothes themselves.[9]

2. The headcovers (*khumur*) should be drawn over the neck slits (*juyoob*). Khumur is the plural of the Arabic word "khimar" which means a headcover.[10] Juyoob is the plural of the Arabic word "jaiyb" (a derivative of jawb or cutting) refers to the neck slit (of the dress). This means that the headcover should be drawn so as to cover not only the hair, but it should also be drawn over the neck and to be extended so as to cover the bosom.

THE SECOND REQUIREMENT: Looseness

The dress must be loose enough so as not to describe the shape of a woman's body. This is consistent with the intent of the 'ayahs cited above (24: 30-31) and is surely a crucial aspect of hiding *zeenah*. Even moderately-tight clothes which cover the whole body do describe the shape of such attractive parts of the woman's body as the bustline, the waist, the buttocks, the back and the thighs. If these are not part of the natural beauty or *zeenah* what else is?

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) once received a thick garment as a gift. He gave it to Osamah b. Zayd, who in turn gave it to his wife. When asked by the Prophet why he did not wear it, Osamah indicated that he gave it to his wife. The Prophet then said to Osamah "ask her to use a *gholalah* غلالة under it (the garment) for I fear that it (the garment) may describe the size of her bones."[11] The word *gholalah* in Arabic means a thick fabric worn under the dress to prevent it from describing the shape of the body.

A highly desirable way of concealing the shape of the body is to wear a cloak over the garment. The Prophet (pbuh), however,

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[9]One weakness with this more stringent interpretation is that "uncontrollable" factors are automatically forgiven without any need for specification. The fact that Qur'an 24:31 exempts from all "*zeenah*" that which is regarded as "ma dhahara minha" is itself an indication of a concession. This concession is confirmed by the Hadith (related to Asma' as will be seen in the discussion of the third requirement. See Al-Albani, Ibid., pp. 25-46.

[10]According to Al-Albani, this meaning of "khirmar" was explained in such authorities as Ibn-ul-Atheer's *An-Nihayah* and *Tafseer-ul-Hafiz Ibn-Kathir* and others. Al Albani reports that he knows of no difference on this point. See Al-Albani, Ibid, pp. 33-34.

[11]This Hadith appears in Musnad Ahmad, also in Al-Bayhaqi, and is confirmed in other sources of Hadith such as Sunan Abi-Dawood. See Al-Albani, Ibid, p. 59-63.

indicated that if the woman's dress meets the Islamic standards it suffices (without a cloak) even for the validity of prayers.[12]

THE THIRD REQUIREMENT: Thickness

The dress should be thick enough so as not to show the color of the skin it covers, or the shape of the body which it is supposed to hide.

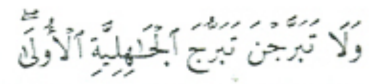
The purpose of *'ayah* (24:31) is to hide the Muslim women's body except *ma dhahara minha* (the face and hands). It is obvious that this purpose cannot be served if the dress is thin enough so as to reveal the color of the skin or the shape or beauty of the body. This is eloquently explained by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): "In later (generations) of my *ummah* there will be women who will be dressed but naked. On top of their heads (what looks) like camel humps. Curse them for they are truly cursed." In another version he added that they "will not enter into paradise or (even) get a smell of it."[13]

At one occasion Asma' (daughter of Abu-Bakr) was visiting her sister 'A'ishah, wife of the Prophet. When he noted that Asma's dress was not thick enough he turned his face away in anger and said, "If the woman reaches the age of puberty, no part of her body should be seen, but this, and he pointed to his face and his hands."[14]

THE FOURTH REQUIREMENT: Overall Appearance

The dress should not be such that it attracts men's attention to the woman's beauty. The Qur'an clearly prescribes the requirements of the woman's dress for the purpose of concealing *zeenah* (adornment). How could such *zeenah* be concealed if the dress is designed in a way that it attracts men's eyes to the woman?

This is why the Qur'an addressing the Prophet's wives as the examples for Muslim women says



[12]See Sayyid Sabiq's *Fiqh-us-Sunnah*, Dar-ul-Kitab-il-'Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 1969, vol. 1, p. 127.

[13]At-Tabarani and Sahih Muslim. See al-Albani, op. cit., p. 56.

[14]At another occasion when the Prophet (pbuh) saw a bride in a thin dress he said, "she is not a woman who believes in Surat-un-Noor who wears this. "Surat-un-Noor is the Surah where the main requirements of the Muslim woman's dress are outlined. Still on another occasion some women from the tribe of Bani Tameem came to visit 'A'ishah in thin clothes. Upon seeing them, the Prophet (pbuh) said, "If you are believers, then these are not believers' clothing." See Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, op. cit, p. 160.

"Bedizen not yourselves with the bedizenment of the Time of Ignorance. . ."[15]

Additional Requirements[16]

In addition to the above four main and clearly spelled out requirements, there are other requirements whose specific applications may vary with time and location. These include:

1. The dress should not be similar to what is known as a male costume. Ibn 'Abbas narrated that "The Prophet (pbuh) cursed the men who act like women and the women who act like men."[17]

2. It should not be similar to what is known as the costume of unbelievers. This requirement is derived from the general rule of Shari'ah that Muslims should have their distinct personality and should differentiate their practices and appearance from unbelievers.[18]

3. It should not be a dress of fame, pride and vanity. Such fame may be sought by wearing an excessively fancy dress as a status symbol or an excessively ragged dress to gain others' admiration of one's selflessness. Both motives are improper by Islamic standards. The Prophet (pbuh) says:

"Whoever wears a dress of fame in this world, Allah will clothe him with a dress of humiliation in the day of resurrection, then set it afire."[19]

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[15]The term used in the Qur'an is *tabarruj* which means displaying of beauty. Another derivative of *tabarruj* is *burooj* which is used in the Qur'an (e.g. 4:77, 15:16, 25:61, 85:1). Burooj means towers because of their clear visibility. Clear "Visibility" of the woman may result from the type of dress, the way she walks, or the way she behaves.

[16]According to Al-Albani, a further requirement is that the dress should not be perfumed. In fact, this requirement extends beyond dress. There are several ahadeeth which make it clearly forbidden for a Muslim woman to wear perfumes when she goes out of her home even if she is going to the mosque. See Al-Albani, op. cit., pp. 64-66.

[17]Al-Bukhari, Abu-Dawood, Ahmad, Ad-darimi. For this and other ahadeeth on the same subject see Al-Albani, Ibid, pp. 66-69.

[18]For an excellent discussion of this principle on the basis of Qur'an and Sunnah, see Al-Albani, Ibid, pp. 78-109.

[19]For this and other versions of the hadeeth see Al-Albani, Ibid, pp. 110-111.

REQUIREMENTS OF MUSLIM MEN'S CLOTHING

It should be noted that the basic requirements of the Muslim woman's dress apply as well to the Muslim man's clothing with the difference being mainly in degree. This can best be understood by looking into what Islam defines as *'awrah* which refers to the part of the body that should be covered at all times unless there is an expressed exception. The covering of *'awrah* is also a condition for the validity of prayers for both men and women.

It has been agreed among jurists on the basis of the Qur'an and Sunnah that "*'awrah* for the woman is defined as the whole body except for the face and hands. For the man, the *'awrah* is defined as the area between the navel and the knees.[20]

Within the definition of *'awrah* for men and women, all the four basic requirements discussed in this paper are essentially the same:

1. Man should fully cover his *'awrah*.

2. Men's clothes should be loose enough so as not to describe what he is covering (his *'awrah*).

3. They sould be thick enough so as not to describe the color of the skin or the parts required to be covered.

4. They should not be designed in a way to attract attention. The basic rule of modesty and avoiding "show off" applies to all believers men and women.

The three other additional requirement discussed under the Muslim woman's code of dress apply to men's clothes as well:

1. They should not be similar to what is knows as the female dress.

2. They should not be similar to what could be identified as the dress of unbelievers.

3. They should not be clothes of fame, pride, and vanity.

In addition to the above limitations on the Muslim man's clothes, men are not allowed to wear silk and gold. This does not apply to women.

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[20]Difference exists, however, among jurists whether the knees and the thighs should be included in the definitio nof the man's *'awrah*. For a good discussion on the evidence related to both views, see Sayyid Sabiq's *Fiqh-us-Sunnah*, op. cit, vol. 1, pp. 125-127

CONCLUSION

There are surely many other issues pertaining to the subjects that are not covered in this paper. Its main focus is on the documented injunctions of Allah (subhanahu wat'ala) as derived from His word (the Qur'an) and as explained by the chosen Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him). These injunctions are to be complied with by all Muslim men and women; and in case of transgression, they will be held accountable in the hereafter. Truly husbands, fathers, and mothers do have an obligation to remind, exhort and help each other achieve the pleasure of Allah and to avoid His wrath. In the final analysis, however, it is not coercion or force which is likely to bring about obedience to Allah. It is but, the love of Allah, the acceptance of His guidance as the supreme Truth even if contrary to one's personal opinions, that will bring about the change.

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For Muslim men and women,—
For believing men and women,
For devout men and women,
For true men and women,
For men and women who are

Patient and constant, for men
And women who humble themselves,
For men and women who give
In charity, for men and women
Who fast (and deny themselves),
For men and women who
Guard their chastity, and

For men and women who
Engage much in God's praise,—
For them has God prepared
Forgiveness and great reward.

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ
وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ
وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ
وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ
وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ
وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ
أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Qur'an, Al-Ahzab 33:35